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June

2007

A Report to the 37th District

Dear neighbors,

How can we make this a better place for our kids? I believe that's our duty as lawmakers and parents — to give our kids a better life than what we had. And I'm happy to tell you this was a great year in Olympia for kids.

The House and Senate passed a number of reforms that will make a real difference in Washington state.

This newsletter isn't big enough to tell you about all the legislation that the governor is signing into law right now. I only have room for the highlights that are important to our families in the 37th District:

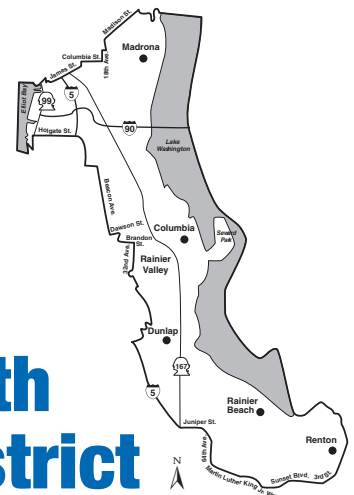
- ◆ Protecting children and families
- ◆ Improving education
- ◆ Supporting small businesses
- ◆ Justice for all

If you have any questions about other issues I don't mention, please contact me. You can reach me anytime by the toll-free Hotline (800-562-600), e-mail or regular mail.

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your representative. It's an honor. I hope this newsletter finds you and your family well, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely yours,

Rep. Eric Pettigrew



**37th
District**

State Representative **Eric Pettigrew**

Protecting children and families

I believe there is no higher calling for the state than to protect the most vulnerable. It's no secret that protecting kids is a passion of mine, and I'm happy to tell you we passed a lot of reforms – and put serious money into the state budget – to protect kids and families.

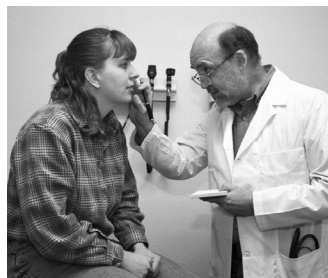
◆ **Cover all kids** — More than 72,000 children in Washington state have zero health coverage. That's a moral outrage. It's also financially stupid, because it's much cheaper to give kids shots and let them see the doctor. The alternative is letting kids without health care wind up clogging our emergency rooms, like they do now.



Before this session, we passed legislation to make it our state's policy that every child will have health coverage by 2010. This session, we passed a reform (Senate Bill 5093) to help make that goal a reality. We cut red tape to make it easier for parents to get their children health coverage and we changed the focus of health care for kids from simply paying for doctor visits to insisting on better results and better health every year.

Now, we're ahead of schedule for 2010. I'm thankful we've worked so hard to make sure every child gets the health care they need.

◆ **Racial disproportionality** (HB 1472) — Data from across the country and locally show that African American and Native American children are over-represented in our state's child welfare system. To fix the problem, this bill creates an advisory committee made up of stakeholders from the state, courts, and community to diagnose the causes for racial disproportionality and make recommendations to the Legislature for remedying it.



◆ **Health care for foster youth** (HB 1201) — Youth in foster care have medical or mental health

problems far greater than other kids. This reform makes sure foster kids are covered up to age 21, which we know from research is a more reasonable time than cutting foster kids off at 18.

◆ **Housing assistance for foster kids**

(HB 1922) — About 400 kids age out of foster care each year at the age of 18. Within one year of leaving the system, 36 percent of former foster kids are either homeless or couch-surfing with friends. This bill helps foster kids get on their feet so they have a chance at success in life.

◆ **Improving our child welfare system**

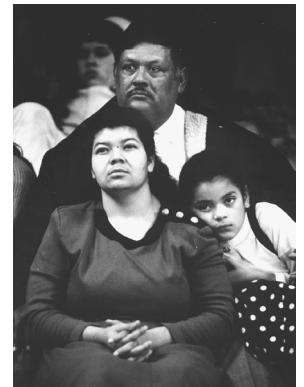
— HB 1377 expands the definition of a relative so that DSHS will have more out-of-home placements options to consider when placing a child through foster care.

— HB 1333 (Sirita's Law) requires parents receive priority access to court-ordered services, and mandate a permanency hearing when a child has been repeatedly removed from a home due to an allegation of abuse or neglect.

— HB 1334 (Raphael Gomez Act) requires DSHS to provide a higher standard of documentation to a dependency court under certain circumstances.

◆ **Helping parent and family caregivers**

— There's \$2 million in the budget for culturally relevant support for caregivers. It's much less expensive – and more compassionate – to have parent or family caregivers than to put people in institutions. The budget also includes money to fund a parent information and referral line, a survey of parent needs and a Parent Support Advisory Committee to the Department of Early Learning.



◆ **Children of incarcerated parents** (HB 1422)

— Two percent of all children have an imprisoned parent. But there are few services to help these kids. This bill directs state agencies to adopt policies and programs to encourage familial contact and engagement between inmates and their children, with the goal of reducing recidivism and intergenerational incarceration.

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Education

Where you end up depends on where you start. We need to make sure all our children have the chance to step off from the same starting line. Children who start school behind tend to stay behind. That's why early learning is one of the smartest investments we can make as a state.

For every dollar we invest in effective early learning programs, the state and taxpayers save seven dollars in the future.

Over the past ten years, research on early brain development has shown us what really works when it comes to early learning. We know that the birth-to-3 years are the most critical. That's why we're expanding parenting education and support to help parents be their child's first and best teachers.

◆ **Early Learning** (HB 1663/SB 5828) — As a parent, how do you know which child care centers and pre-schools are the best in your area? How do you pick? This bill establishes a voluntary quality rating and improvement system for licensed child care providers, with teacher training money as an incentive to participate. This is a win for kids, parents and child care center teachers.



◆ **Home visits** (HB 1365/SB 5830) — Home visits by nurses are a proven way to make sure every child — rich or poor — gets a great start. Home visits boost the likelihood that a child will enter school ready to learn. This bill funds home visits and consolidates the various existing services into one strong program to help every kid succeed.

◆ **Expanding the state's pre-school program** (ECEAP) — The state budget includes \$34.2 million to give more children the chance to participate in our state's pre-school program. Research proves that kids in quality pre-schools succeed in school.



◆ **Child-care labor agreement** — The state budget includes more than \$85 million to increase child care subsidy rates. It's an outrage that a person with an education degree who teaches kids at a pre-school or child care center makes starvation wages. We're working hard to pay a fair wage to the good people

who teach and care for our youngest and most vulnerable children.

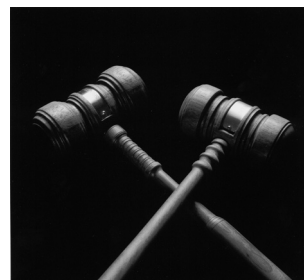
◆ **Opportunity Grants and Partnerships** (HB 1096) — Early learning is the starting line. College is the finishing line, and that's what this bill is about. We expanded financial aid and support to low-income adults so they can enroll in workforce programs such as allied health, construction, welding, and manufacturing.



We also created the opportunity partnership program, which will provide mentoring, counseling and advising. The goal of Opportunity Grants is to eventually make the first two years of college free for any student willing to study hard.

Justice for all

I believe the difference between a just society and anarchy — or a dictatorship — is that everyone is equal under the law: rich or poor, black or white, Asian or Hispanic, young or old. Nobody should skate because they're rich or powerful, and nobody should be punished for being poor or not speaking English.



To make sure we respect the ideals of justice in our state and federal constitutions, we passed a number of reforms and put money in the budget to bolster access to justice for all.

◆ **Abused and neglected children** — There are 13,000 children in Washington's state juvenile dependency court system. About half of these children received Court Appointed Special Advocates to help best determine the best interests of the child. This budget devotes \$6 million to help give children a voice in judicial proceedings.

◆ **Court interpreters** (HB 1008) — Locally funded courts are struggling to meet demand for court interpreters. It's amazing how many languages are spoken just in our 37th District.

People who are native English speakers have enough trouble understanding lawyers speaking legalese. In complex legal proceedings, it's vital that everyone be able to understand what's happening so they can pro-

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protect their rights, or their children's rights. We put \$2 million in the state budget to do just that.

◆ **Public defense** — It's our constitutional duty to make sure people too poor to hire a lawyer can still get represented in court. We more than tripled the contribution from last year, devoting \$7 million to public defense programs across the state.

◆ **Legal aid for families** — More than 75 percent of poor families experience a need for legal representation every year. That's 1 million cases in court. But 88 percent of these families have zero access to the legal help they need. These are vulnerable seniors, domestic violence survivors, victims of predatory lending schemes, children who need special educational assistance and the disabled. They need our help. This budget includes \$4.8 million to give them access to our justice system.

Supporting small businesses

We all want our hometown – and our neighborhoods – to be safe and prosperous places. Small businesses are the key to our local economy.

Washington has the nation's highest rate for new business start-ups and we consistently rank among the top five states in the nation for small businesses. But we're not satisfied. We're still pushing to do better. This year, we:

- cut red tape and we continue to seek the elimination of burdensome business regulations;

- increased the amount of reduced interest rate loans available through the Linked Deposit program for minority-owned and women-owned business; and
- cut unemployment insurance rates for start-up businesses.

◆ **Small works roster for small businesses** (HB 1328) — State agencies and local governments may use the small works roster process to award contracts for public works projects estimated to cost \$200,000 or less. We opened the bidding and contract process to smaller businesses. This will help many women-owned and minority businesses.

◆ **Linked deposit program** (HB 1512) — It's hard for minorities and women to get the traditional bank loans they need to open a business. The linked deposit program increases access to capital for minority-owned and women-owned businesses. We increased the amount for the linked deposit program from \$100 million to \$150 million.

◆ **Health Insurance Partnership** (HB 1569) — We helped small employers provide health care insurance for their employees. Small businesses that have at least one worker with an income up to 200 percent of federal poverty level (\$41,300 a year for a family of four) will be able to purchase coverage through the Health Insurance Partnership.



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State Representative

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